

"
The clock sends me to bed at ten, and makes me
rise at eight. I go to bed awake, and arise asleep; but
I have ever held conformity one of the best arts of life,
and though I might choose my own hours, I think
it proper to follow theirs"

E. Montagu's Letters

Speak of the duty, inconvenience and dangers
of conformity, in little things and great.

Neither natural nor revealed religion affords any
rules by which we may determine the comparative
enormity of different vices, or the comparative excellence
of different virtues. The Hebrew code, which Christ
came not to destroy but to fulfil, makes no such
distinction—vice, under whatever form, is condemned in
unqualified and positive terms. We are told, in our
Mosaic's exposition of the Law, that one jot or one
tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all
be fulfilled;—and whosoever shall break one of the
least commandments, and shall teach men so, he
shall be called the least in the Kingdom of
heaven. So far, too, as man has deduced a moral

code from a philosophical study of ~~the works of~~ ^{Nature}
~~creation~~ ^{her} ~~their~~ operation and design—our remark
will hold good with respect to that also.

The idea appears to be a prevalent one, that duty
consists in certain outward acts, whose performance is
more or less obligatory under different circumstances,
though it can never be entirely neglected with impu-
nity; and, consequently, that one duty may interfere
with another, and that there may be situations in
which a man cannot possibly avoid the violation
of duty. This arises, I think, from confining duty
to the outward act, instead of making it consist
in conformity to the dictates of an inward arbiter,
~~or a measure independent of matter, and its re-~~
~~lations, time and space.~~

Duty is one and invariable—it requires no im-
possibilities, nor can it ever be disregarded with im-
punity; so far as it exists, it is binding, and if
all duties are binding, so as on no account to
be neglected, how can one bind stronger than an-
other?

So far then as duty is concerned, we may entirely
neglect the distinction of little things and great.
More conformity to another's habits or customs

10
is never, properly speaking, a duty, though it may follow as
a natural consequence of the performance of duty.

The fact that such is the general practice of man-
kind does not affect a question of duty. I am required,
it is true, to respect the feelings of my neighbor
within the limits of his own estate, but the fear
of displeasing the world ought not, in the least, to
influence my actions; were it otherwise, the prin-
cipal avenue to reform would be closed.

Thoreau May 19th

(XVIII)